

## **Week 12 Forgotten Love**

### Review of Last Week

Not a book that is meant to confuse, conceal or be cryptic. It is a book that is to unveil to us who Jesus really is and what will soon take place.

We also learned that the first 65 books of the Bible lay the foundation for Revelation. Books like Daniel, Ezekiel, Genesis, Thessalonians, and Matthew. There is not much new in this book that hasn't previously been introduced.

Also, we learned that this book is straight from God through John to us. The purpose of this book is to tell us what was, what is and what is to come. It is a self proclaimed Word of God and a book of prophecy.

Last week we covered what was....we saw Jesus as He really is...we saw Jesus tending to the 7 lampstands which are the 7 churches...We learned that he has the angels or pastors of those churches in His right hand....and we learned that even John passed out when saw the fully revealed glorified Jesus Christ. For John those things are what was.....

Now in Chapter 2 and 3 we are going to learn about the things that are. John is asked to write 7 letters to 7 churches. These letters give the current condition of those 7 churches from Jesus' perspective.

Let's Review again these 7 Churches.

These were all churches in Asia Minor....now modern day Turkey. They were likely church plants from the church at Ephesus. If you remember John was the pastor of the Church at Ephesus and these churches were likely very well known to him. He most likely helped to support them and probably preached at them.

These 7 churches were on the trade routes, the Roman Roads, that left the seaport of Ephesus to go to distant parts of Asia and Asia Minor.

These were 7 real churches in real places, led by real pastor, and consisted of real first century believers.

Let me also remind you that we spoke of the importance of numbers in Revelation. The numbers 3, 7 and 12 represented completion or fullness.

Also remember that there were two great persecutions of Christians in the first Century. Jesus was crucified in 32 AD. Thirty years later Nero persecuted the Christians for supposedly burning Rome this was around 64 AD. Both Peter and Paul were martyred during that time period. Then about 30 Years later in 98AD Domitian began persecuting Christians. At that time John was the last remaining Apostle and he most likely wrote Revelation as that persecution was ramping up. Likely in 95 AD

## Letter to Ephesus

This City. A very important city in Asia Minor. It is on the coast and is a huge seaport. It likely had 250-300 thousand residents. A city a little bit smaller than Tampa. It is a very wealthy city because it is the international port for trade. In addition, it is a hub for the Roman Road system.

In addition, it is a hub for the Roman Road system. The Romans built over 60,000 miles of roads. Ephesus is the hub of that region and the spokes that go out from Ephesus are where these 7 churches are located.

In the time of the Romans it bore the title of “the first and greatest metropolis of Asia.” It was distinguished for the Temple of Diana, who there had her chief shrine; and for its theatre, which was the largest in the world, capable of containing 50,000 spectators. It was, like all ancient theatres, open to the sky. Here were exhibited the fights of wild beasts and of men with beasts

The Temple of Artemis (or Diana, according to her Roman name) at Ephesus ranked as one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. As the twin sister of Apollo and the daughter of Zeus, Artemis was known variously as the moon goddess, the goddess of hunting, and the patroness of young girls. The temple at Ephesus housed the image of Artemis that was reputed to have come directly from Zeus

This great city was also world-famous as a religious, cultural, and economic center of the region. Ephesus had the notable temple of Diana, a fertility goddess worshipped with immoral sex. This tremendous temple to Diana in Ephesus was regarded as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. It was supported by 127 pillars, each pillar 60 feet tall, and it was adorned with great sculptures.

“The Temple of Artemis was also a major treasury and bank of the ancient world, where merchants, kings, and even cities made deposits, and where their money could be kept safe under the protection of deity.”

“Ephesus was a stronghold of Satan. Here many evil things both superstitious and satanic were practised. Books containing formula for sorcery and other ungodly and forbidden arts were plentiful in that city.”

A main thoroughfare, some 35 meters (105 feet) wide, ran from the theater to the harbor, at each end of which stood an impressive gate. The thoroughfare was flanked on each side by rows of columns 15 meters (50 feet) deep. Behind these columns were baths, gymnasiums, and impressive buildings.

Let me remind you about the church at Ephesus. Paul founded this church during his missionary journey. If you remember a man named Apollos was preaching in Ephesus when Priscilla and Aquila heard him and learned that he had not been baptized in the Spirit, but rather just John's Baptism.

Many Jews took up their residence in this city, and here the seeds of the gospel were sown immediately after Pentecost (Acts 2:9; 6:9). At the close of his second missionary journey (about A.D. 51), when Paul was returning from Greece to Syria (18:18–21), he first visited

this city. He remained, however, for only a short time, as he was hastening to keep the feast, probably of Pentecost, at Jerusalem; but he left Aquila and Priscilla behind him to carry on the work of spreading the gospel.

The history of Christianity at Ephesus began about a.d. 50, perhaps as a result of the efforts of Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 18:18). Paul came to Ephesus in about a.d. 52, establishing a resident ministry for the better part of three years (Acts 20:31). During his Ephesian ministry, Paul wrote 1 Corinthians

Paul discovered the same thing when he arrived. Believers who had not received the Holy Spirit. After praying for them and seeing them receive the Spirit....

Acts 19:8–10 (ESV) — 8 And he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God. 9 But when some became stubborn and continued in unbelief, speaking evil of the Way before the congregation, he withdrew from them and took the disciples with him, reasoning daily in the hall of Tyrannus. 10 This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.

Notice the opposition to the Gospel message. People were speaking evil in the Synagogue so Paul took the believers and preached for two years in the Hall of Tyrannus. And notice that ALL the residents of Asia heard the Gospel, Jews and Greeks.

During his third missionary journey Paul reached Ephesus from the “upper coasts” (Acts 19:1), i.e., from the inland parts of Asia Minor, and tarried here for about three years; and so successful and abundant were his labours that “all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks” (19:10). Probably during this period the seven churches of the Apocalypse were founded, not by Paul’s personal labours, but by missionaries whom he may have sent out from Ephesus, and by the influence of converts returning to their homes.

Ephesus is where those who were involved in magic, witchcraft and similar actions burned all of their books in public. Those books we learn in Acts 19 was worth 50,000 pieces of silver.

Ephesus is also the city where there was a riot because Paul put the silversmiths out of business because no one wanted silver idols anymore.

They dragged companions of Paul into the streets while chanting "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians"

Acts 19:35–38 (ESV) — 35 And when the town clerk had quieted the crowd, he said, “Men of Ephesus, who is there who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is temple keeper of the great Artemis, and of the sacred stone that fell from the sky? 36 Seeing then that these things cannot be denied, you ought to be quiet and do nothing rash. 37 For you have brought these men here who are neither sacrilegious nor blasphemers of our goddess. 38 If therefore Demetrius and the craftsmen with him have a complaint against anyone, the courts are open, and there are proconsuls. Let them bring charges against one another.

It was in Paul's letter the Ephesians that he explained and told them to put on the armor of God- because they were going to need it.

Then as Paul was making his last trip to Jerusalem. He stopped by Ephesus and met with their elders. He had already protected them from false teachers by moving the early church to a new location....Now years later...

Acts 20:29–32 (ESV) — 29 I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; 30 and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. 31 Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears. 32 And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

Paul left Timothy there to watch over the church when he was imprisoned in Rome before his death around 64AD

1 Timothy 1:3–4 (ESV) — 3 As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, 4 nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith.

So Ephesus was a critical city to the spread of the Gospel. False teachers were a huge concern. Paul protected them from false teaching while he was there, then warned the Elders that these teachers would arise within the flock and finally leaving his protege Timothy to serve there. Eventually John goes to Ephesus and becomes the pastor before getting exiled to Patmos.

In the sixth century a.d. the Roman emperor Justinian (a.d. 527–565) raised a magnificent church to John's memory in this city. Ephesus continued to play a prominent role in the history of the early church. A long line of bishops in the Eastern church lived there. In a.d. 431 the Council of Ephesus officially condemned the Nestorian heresy, which taught that there were two separate persons, one divine and one human, in the person of Jesus Christ.

Revelation 2:1 (ESV) — 1 "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: .

We spoke last week about how cool it would be if each church had its own angel and maybe we do. I pray that there is an angel over Remnant. But it is unlikely that if God wanted to communicate with an angel about the condition of the church, that He would have John write a physical letter. I think God has better ways of communicating with angels. In addition, an angel over the church would already know that church's spiritual condition

The word in Hebrew for angel means "Messenger" the one who is responsible for delivering the message from God to the congregation. So since this is a real physical letter, going to real churches, in real places, with real issues, it is most likely that the 7 angels are the 7 pastors of those churches.

That is incredible to me because we will see that these churches have real issues...but their pastor is still in the right hand of God and He is walking among the churches tending to their lampstands.

I would much rather know that I am in the right hand of Jesus than to know there is an angel assigned to our church.

However, I like the idea of both.

Now think about this....John is told to write a letter to the messenger or pastor of Ephesus....as he begins writing, he realizes that this letter is to him.

This letter follows the same pattern as the other 7 letters. So let's look at it. There is an introduction from Jesus, then a commendation, then a condemnation, and then it is followed with a call to action.

For the most part, all 7 letters follow the same pattern with just a two exceptions. First, for the Church in Smyrna there are not words of Condemnation....and for the church at Laodicea there are no words of commendation...ouch. We will find out why when we get there.

Revelation 2:1 (ESV) — 1 “To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: ‘The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands.

Jesus identifies Himself to this church by describing the vision that has just been revealed to us. He holds the 7 stars and walks among the Lampstands.

They emphasize the authority of Jesus in the Church (He holds the seven stars) and His immediate presence in the Church (He walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands). This introduction stresses that Jesus is central to the church, and should be recognized as central to the church.

Holds: This is the ancient Greek word *kratein*, and is an emphatic and complete word. Jesus has these churches, and holds them securely. The churches belong to Jesus, not to the leaders of the churches or to the people of the churches. He holds them.

Revelation 2:2–3 (ESV) — 2 “‘I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. 3 I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name’s sake, and you have not grown weary.

Jesus describes for John the way things are at the Church of Ephesus. He says, I know. He is the only one who really knows the spiritual condition of a church or its members. Remember His eyes were penetrating like fire....seeing everything....burning through pretense or fake efforts in the church. He sees with the searing penetration of truth. His opinion about these churches is the only opinion that matters.

It was no mystery to Him. There may be sin or corruption hidden in a congregation, but it isn't hidden to Jesus. He would say the same thing to us today, both as individuals and as a congregation: I know your works.

So what is the current Spiritual Condition of the Church at Ephesus?

Jesus begins His commendation and lists 7 of them.

I know your works

I have been watching and I know what you have been doing for the gospel. I know your works.

I know your toil

I know that this work did not come easily. You have had to struggle and it has been very hard work. I see that. I know how hard you have been striving.

I know your patient endurance

I know that there have been times when you wanted to quit. When it seemed too hard. When you wanted to give up. Yet you waited, you kept striving and you have endured.

I know how you cannot tolerate those who are evil.

You have a very clear sense of what is right and what is wrong. You have a very strong moral code and follow it. You hold strong to your ethics and you will not put up with people who don't strive to meet those standards.

I know that you have tested those who call themselves apostles but are not, and found them to be false. Do you remember what Paul told the Church in Ephesus when he left there?

Acts 20:29–31 (ESV) — 29 I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; 30 and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. 31 Therefore be alert,

The growing church was a profitable movement.

I know that you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my sake.

I know that you are bearing up...you are facing hardships....trials....tough times. I want you to know that I see these things. I know how hard it has been for you.

I know that you have not grown weary.

It would have been easy to give up or to wear down over time, but you have not done that. You have not grown weary. No matter how hard things have become you are still doing your best and standing strong. No matter what you would not quit.

7 Commendation and John has to be really excited about delivering this letter to his church! Thanks Jesus...I'll get this right out to them. Not so fast.

### Words of Condemnation

Revelation 2:4–5 (ESV) — 4 But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first.

Jesus used a sobering word—nevertheless, which means “despite all that.” Jesus took into full account all the good in the Ephesian church, yet despite all that, He had something against them.

You have abandoned or left the love that you had at first. Many have misquoted this verse by saying "You have lost your first love" They hadn't lost it, they walked away from it....much worse.

The distinction between leaving and losing is important. Something can be lost quite by accident, but leaving is a deliberate act, though it may not happen suddenly. As well, when we lose something we don't know where to find it; but when we leave something, we know where to find it we are just choosing not to look.

Though they had left their first love, everything looked great on the outside. If you would have attended a service of the church at Ephesus, you might have thought, “This is a happening church. They are doing so much, and they really guard the truth.” At the same time, you might have had a vague, uneasy feeling—yet it would probably be hard to pin down. It wasn't hard for Jesus to see the problem, even though everything probably looked wonderful on the outside.

What love did they leave? As Christians, we are told to love God and to love one another. Did they leave their love for God? Did they leave their love for one another? Probably both are in mind, because the two loves go together. You can't say you love God and not love His family, and you can't really love His family without loving Him first.

The Ephesian church was a doctrinally pure church. Sometimes a focus on doctrinal purity will make a congregation cold, suspicious, and intolerant of diversity

Remember by the time John is writing this he is an old man likely near age 90. He has been in ministry for over 60 years. This has to be particularly painful for John to hear because He always referred to himself as "the one who Jesus loved" He was known as the loving disciple. He had the wonderful way with words. We spoke last week about how he was likely the little brother of the group.

He had a funny and engaging relationship with Jesus. He asked his mother to approach Jesus for him and ask a favor....Jesus responds in a very funny manner....Yeah right "Sons of Thunder" John was never brash and bold. He was the thinking, introspective poet of the group. Peter might have been a real son of thunder. But John....no...Jesus was playing with him.

Jesus is calling him back to those moments. John remember how you felt about me when we first started? Remember how you were on fire with love for me? John described those first feelings in the Letter of First John.

1 John 1:1–4 (ESV) — 1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— 2 the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—

Look at how carefully John places these words...That which we have heard. John traveled with Jesus for 3 years...He heard every sermon, every discussion, everything Jesus had to say. He heard him in those late night discussions. He heard Him love those who seemed unlovable. He heard Him rebuke those who seemed to have power. He knew the sound, the inflection and the subtleties of Jesus' voice. That which we have heard.

Which we have seen with our own eyes. John knew what Jesus looked like. He knew what His eyes were like, He knew his body habitus, He knew how Jesus walked, He knew Jesus' expression when he laughed, He knew the hand gestures Jesus used and He had seen it all. That which we have seen.

That which we looked upon....or the original word is better "gazed." John didn't just see Jesus, he gazed upon Him with wonder. In those moments when he wondered what kind of man this is, he gazed upon Him. He gazed with wonder upon Christ.

That which we have touched with our hands. How many times do you think Jesus touched John? Put his arm around him, slapped him on the back, prayed over him by laying on His hands, gave him a hand to help him up a climb, or just gave him a gentle touch of reassurance. John likewise at times reaching out to touch Jesus in the same manner. The one we have touched with our own hands.

The one who we proclaim is the Word of Life. John had an intimate relationship with Jesus and now in Revelation Jesus is saying.....You have abandoned your first love.

How does the last remaining apostle, the leader of the Church of Ephesus, the writer of 5 different books of the Bible....lead a church that loses its first love? How could that possibly happen? This is John the Apostle!

I totally get it. John has been in ministry for over 60 years. I have known and shared experiences with a lot of pastors over the last 16 years or so that I have been in ministry. We all started out in our early days responding to God's call for one simple reason: We fell in love with Christ and want to serve Him and give our life to Him. That is our first love.

It is the same way when you are in love with anyone. Early on everything is exciting and new. You are driven by this incredible love that you feel. Every thought, your life....it all revolves around that person.



But after some years of ministry things change. You are now the Pastor of a church, you have a staff, you have a budget, you have a building to maintain, you have expectations to meet, a board of elders to respond to, an offering to maintain, attendance to keep up, you are running a business. You have sermons to write, programs to launch, people to counsel, weddings to officiate and funerals to walk through with people. You are almost always on call and almost everyone is unhappy about something. Yet, it is the greatest honor and job in the world. You get to serve Jesus and lead others to do the same. You get to teach the Word and see lives changed. You get invited into the most intimate moments of people's lives. You get enormous support from those in the church. But sometimes in the quietness of your soul when you are all alone....you ask yourself...How did I get here?

Because it is so easy in ministry to get so involved in the church that you set Jesus aside. It happens to so many pastors and they are leaving the ministry in droves. They are unable to reconnect to their first love because their ministry prevents it.

It's not just true of ministry....it can happen to any of us. We can over time abandon or leave our first love. We haven't lost it, we have just ignored it. It can happen in any loving relationship. Great Marriages learn how to reconnect with their first love.

There is a definite, sure difference in their relationship with Jesus. Things aren't as they used to be. It isn't that we expect that we should have the exact same excitement we had when everything was brand new in the Christian life, but the newness should transition into a depth that makes the first love even stronger.

It is a good analogy since the church is the Bride of Christ. Our relationship with Jesus is like a marriage.

The walk of a Christian and a marriage are like any love relationship. There are mountaintop moments that take your breath away. There are valleys that seem so dark and in between there is a lot of flat land that just goes on. In every relationship that lasts you learn how to reconnect with your first love and you realize that your love for that person is now deeper, more solid and built on a lifetime of memories.

Your spiritual journey with Jesus is the same way. You can't be on a spiritual mountaintop all the time. There are dark times, flat times, and all times in between.

Look at King David's life. He had mountaintops, valleys, some really dark places and he pours out his emotions during those times in the Psalms. He complains to God, cries out to God, praises God and sometimes he just seems flat.

That is how it is in the church. Most of us if we were really honest realize that this condemnation is not just for the Church at Ephesus but for all of us. All churches of all times...and each of us in our personal relationship/marriage with Christ.

5 Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first.

The first step in restoration for the Ephesian church is for them to remember. They need to remember from where you have fallen. This means remembering where they used to be in their love for the Lord and for one another.

Repent: This is not a command to feel sorry, or really to feel anything. It means to change your direction, to go a different way. It is an “urgent appeal for instant change of attitude and conduct, before it is too late.”

Do the first works: This means that they must go back to the basics, to the very first things they did when you first fell in love with Jesus. These are the things that we never grow beyond.

The Lord Jesus is saying to John, to the Church at Ephesus, and to all of us.....I want you to get back there. To that first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; Then Jesus warns them

Revelation 2:5 (ESV) — 5 repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.

Jesus will remove the church. He will take it away. When Paul left the Church at Ephesus 40 years before John and this letter. He said that every person in Asia Minor had heard the gospel.

In the early church, Asia Minor was the engine that drove the evangelistic efforts of the movement.

Some 40 years or so later....Jesus is warning John. If you don't repent and get back to your first love, I will remove your lampstand. How did that turn out?

If you go to Turkey today, it is 98% Muslim. There are only 3 churches today in Istanbul and they are very hard to find. Our church has learned about Turkey. Those churches that do exist are sparsely attended by those who call Turkey home. Did Jesus remove that lampstand?...I think so. I showed you pictures and not one standing church is there today.

Imagine how crushed John is at this moment. He knows it is true. He knows that Jesus knows. The person who John loved more than anyone on the planet....has chastised him for not losing but abandoning Him. I love that Jesus didn't leave John in a total disillusioned mess.

Revelation 2:6 (ESV) — 6 Yet this you have: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

The Nicolaitans were people who took the approach that the church should accommodate itself to the dominate culture.

Ephesus was a very enlightened city and considered to have incredible culture. Their theater sat 25K people. It was the home of the Temple of Diana one of the 7 wonders of the ancient world. It had one of the three great libraries of that time. It was a very sophisticated city and the church was right in the midst of all that.

Irenaeus (writing in the late second century) described what he knew of the Nicolaitans: "The Nicolaitanes are the followers of that Nicolas who was one of the seven first ordained to the diaconate by the apostles. They lead lives of unrestrained indulgence. The character of these men is plainly pointed out in the Apocalypse of John, as teaching that it is a matter of indifference to practice adultery, and to eat things sacrifice to idols."

The Nicolaitans, like all deceivers that come from the body of Christ, claimed "not that they were destroying Christianity, but that they were presenting an improved and modernized version of it." (Barclay)

So there were people who said, The church should accommodate the wishes and desires of the people. The church needs to compromise and get along. Bring in what is good from society and enhance the church with it. There are plenty of Nicolaitans in our society today and in Sarasota every weekend. We need to connect with people today and entertain them. If they always feel good then they will keep coming back to church.

The problem is that the church was never instructed to connect people to the church. We were instructed to connect them to Jesus and let the church grow out of that connection.

But let me just say as clearly as I can. That is not what the church is about. We get the word church from the word *eklesia* in Greek.

Meaning literally "those called out of" The church of Jesus Christ are those who have been called out of the world and its culture and into the Family of God.

How are we to look at the world? The world is the Titanic, it has crashed and is destined for doom and our job is, not to get on the boat, but to get as many as we can in the lifeboats.

The church was never to blend into or accommodate the culture around it. The church is revolutionary and confrontational to the culture in which God has placed it.

The Nicolaitans were saying "Let's just all get along and the church should make some compromises to reach people" Picture the fire in His eyes, the penetrating piercing look of judgment, the thunderous voice look at John and say, "I HATE THAT!"

These are powerful words, in that they came from our Savior who is so rich in love. Whoever exactly the Nicolaitans were, and whatever exactly they did and taught, we learn something from Jesus' opinion of them. We learn that the God of love hates sin, and wants His people to also hate sin.

Then Jesus closes this letter with a call to action.

Revelation 2:7 (ESV) — 7 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.'

Apparently, at least in the short term, the Ephesians heeded this warning. In the early second century (not too long after John wrote), Ignatius praised the love and the doctrinal purity of the Ephesians. "You, who are of the most holy Church of the Ephesians, which is so famous and

celebrated throughout the world ... you, being full of the Holy Spirit, do nothing according to the flesh, but all things according to the Spirit. You are complete in Christ Jesus.”

From what Ignatius wrote, it seems that the Ephesians returned to their first love without compromising doctrinal purity. That isn't always an easy balance to keep, but the Ephesians apparently kept it, at least for a time.

The promise for these overcomers was a return to Eden, a restoration, and eternal life. This was meant first in the eternal sense of making it to heaven, which was no small promise to a church threatened with the removal of Jesus' presence. It is also meant in the sense of seeing the effects of the curse rolled back in our own lives though walking in Jesus' redeeming love.

#### Application for Us.

Let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches: Each one of these seven letters apply to all churches. We must hear what the Spirit says to the churches—not just to one church. These letters—each of them—were meant to speak to you, if you will only have an ear to hear what the Spirit says.

Do you remember last week when we looked at the first chapter? Jesus told John to reveal what was, what is and what is to come. In chapter 2 and chapter 3 the letters to the 7 churches Jesus is revealing what is. What was current in their time and what is current in our time. So this letter is a warning to you and me....right now....in this moment.

It is so easy to abandon your first love and still think everything is ok. You are going about doing what good Christians do..you are attending church....maybe volunteering in a ministry....maybe never missing small group....you talk about Jesus at work....you try to live a moral and God honoring life.

Maybe on the outside everyone would look in and think everything is ok. But think about John....think about this incredible church at Ephesus. They were founded by Paul....led by John....they did incredible things and looked incredible on the outside.....and yet Jesus told THEM they had abandoned their first love....

How do you know if Jesus is front and center in your life? How do you know if you are just going through the motions? How do you know if you have abandoned your first love?

I think there are three key parameters that in my mind have always measured someone's personal devotion to Christ. Because serving and attending don't measure it.

Look at these areas of your life.....First, your personal time alone with God in His Word.....Second your personal time in prayer with God..... third and final your commitment to tithe. Fourth the frequency of your surrender to Him.

When you are in love with someone....you spend time learning everything you can about them....for Jesus that means spending time in His Word.....you also love talking to them....so you spend time in prayer with God.....and Jesus said....where your heart is your treasure follows. So if you are in love with Jesus you give Him gifts and support what is important to Him. And then the frequency of your surrender to Him. We are called to surrender to His

truth and not to embrace your own. Those who are in love with Jesus have a desire to surrender easily to His truth. Love drives our selfless devotion to Him.

We too must follow Jesus' command. Remember from where you have fallen. Repent and turn back to Jesus. Do the things you did at first....What are they?

What are the first works? • Remember how you used to spend time in His Word? • Remember how you used to pray? • Remember the joy in getting together with other Christians? • Remember how excited you were about telling others about Jesus?

Only you can consider the question of where you stand with your first love of Jesus. Once again though it is not your opinion that matters. If Jesus looked at your life, and He does.....would He say " You Frank, You Ed, You Natalie, You Tammy.....You Remnant....Have walked away from me. You didn't lose me....You have chosen to not love me.

Or worse, perhaps you have allowed the ways of the world...to impact your relationship with Christ. You see it is easy to see the Nicolaitans in the church....but the pleasures of the world...the ways of the world....can be very present in our personal relationship with Jesus.

Jesus said to them and to us....I HATE THAT

Communion is a time where we examine ourselves. Well actually we allow the Holy Spirit to examine us. We surrender to His view of what is true about our lives. We take off our rose colored glasses, we refuse to candy coat our situation, we crawl naked and exposed on to the altar of God as living sacrifices and say Jesus tell me what you see in me. How is my lampstand?

On the night before Jesus was crucified, He established the Lord's Supper...a new covenant in His blood. He told us that the bread is His body and the wine is His blood shed for us.

God taught us through Paul to make sure that when we take communion we examine ourselves. Communion is a time where we surrender to God and agree with Him about our condition. Choosing to take communion is essentially our way of signing the consent form to allow Him to do whatever is necessary to heal us.

In a moment we will take communion once again and surrender once again to His truth and His plans for our lives. Let's Pray.